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# **ALAPSZAKOS SZAKDOLGOZAT**

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# ALAPSZAKOS SZAKDOLGOZAT

*A tömörítési készség fejlesztésének előnyei*  
*The benefits of developing summarisation skills*

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**2016**

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## **Abstract**

The ability to summarise is undoubtedly an essential skill in tertiary education. It not only allows students to include other authors' ideas in their own writing without plagiarising, but it can also serve as an effective study tool which helps students to become better learners, readers, and writers. Although there is overwhelming research evidence concerning the positive impact of explicit summarisation instruction on students' various skills, such as reading comprehension, writing ability, vocabulary knowledge, and critical thinking skills, there appears to be no comprehensive synthesis of the findings. Consequently, the main aim of this thesis is to present a systematic overview of research studies which investigated this topic. It illustrates the complexity of the summary writing process, emphasises the relevance of summarisation skills in the academic context, and explores the educational benefits of summarisation skills development.

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## **1. Introduction**

The ability to effectively summarise information is essential in tertiary education for a variety of reasons. With the help of summarisation, students can incorporate ideas from a source text into their own writings without committing plagiarism by copying or without using too many direct quotations (Keck, 2006). In addition, by developing their summarisation skills, students acquire not only a set of effective text comprehension and production tools but also a useful study technique which, for instance, can allow them to monitor their own understanding of content material (Hidi & Anderson, 1986).

The impact of explicit summarisation instruction on students' various abilities has been extensively studied in the case of both L1 and L2 learners. It has been found that summary writing can considerably enhance a number of different skills such as reading comprehension, the ability to recall information, writing competence, vocabulary skills, and critical thinking skills, all of which are of great value for both secondary school students and undergraduates (Rose, 2001). Although there is overwhelming research evidence available on the beneficial effects of summarisation skills development, there appears to be no comprehensive synthesis of the findings. Therefore, the main aim of this thesis is to present a systematic overview of research studies on this subject in order to highlight the numerous advantages of summarisation practice for students.

The body part of this paper is structured as follows. Section 2 provides a general overview of written summaries by identifying their most important features, their main types, and the skills underlying the summarisation process. In Section 3, the importance of summarisation skills in the academic context is emphasised. Section 4 reviews some of the research studies available on the impact of summarisation instruction on students' different skills. Finally, Section 5 explores the educational benefits of summary writing as a study tool.

## **2. A general overview of written summarisation**

Friend (2001) defines summarisation as “the process of determining what content in a passage is most important and transforming it into a succinct statement in one’s own words” (p. 3). Although this might not seem to be a difficult task at first, summary writing is in fact a cognitively challenging process which is different from other academic writing tasks because it requires students to demonstrate not only their writing competence but also their reading and paraphrasing skills (Hidi & Anderson, 1986). In addition, instead of presenting their own thoughts, summarisers have to rephrase the essence of passages written by other authors. To illustrate the intricate nature of the summary writing process, the characteristic features of summaries, their main types, and the skills necessary for successful summarisation are described in the following subsections.

### **2.1 Characteristics of written summaries**

Swales and Feak (1994) propose three basic requirements that an adequate global summary (defined in Section 2.2 below) must fulfil. First, the key points of the source text must be covered in a balanced manner. This means that the summary writer must devote equal attention to each part of the text, extract the central ideas from all subsections, and include them in the summary. Second, the presentation of the information must be neutral. In other words, the summary must be objective and cannot include the summariser’s subjective opinion and feelings regarding the topic. Third, the gist of the text must be restated in a concise form. As Tankó (2013) states, the summary must be shorter than the original text, but its length depends on several factors. The length, the content, and the function of the source text as well as the type of summary written all have a crucial role in determining the length of the summary. In addition, Tankó notes that the rearrangement of the ideas of the original text is allowed as long as the propositions are logically organised, the message remains unambiguous, and the summary is a faithful account of the gist of the

source text. Swales and Feak (1994) add to the third principle the requirement that a summary must be rewritten with the words of the summary writer. This feature is discussed in Section 2.3.3 below.

## **2.2 Types of summaries**

According to Tankó (2013), summaries can be classified into various types on the basis of different criteria. To begin with, a summary can be either spoken, such as telling a friend about a film, or written, for example, notes taken during a lecture. However, the focus of this paper is written summarisation; thus, oral summaries shall not be discussed.

A written summary can constitute a complete, independent text which can be fully understood without familiarity with the original text. Such a summary is called a stand-alone summary. An example for this type is the abstract of a research article, which provides a brief description of the research study. Contrarily, an integrated summary constitutes an essential part of a text, and therefore it can only be understood within its context. For instance, when writing about literature, certain parts of the literary work in focus can be summarised in order to illustrate a point the writer is trying to make.

Moreover, Ridley (2012) and Tankó (2013) differentiate between global and guided summaries. When writing a global summary, each important idea of a source text must be included in the summarised version of that text. In contrast, guided summaries contain only those ideas that are in connection with the topic of the text the summariser is writing. Consequently, in the case of the latter summary type, some key content elements of the source text might be eliminated if they are not relevant to the writer's purposes.

A summary can also be informal or formal, depending on the writer's goals and audience. Hidi and Anderson (1986) believe that these two types have not only distinct functions but also different conditions. An informal summary is written for the summariser, that is, it is writer-based and helps the summariser's comprehension of an

unfamiliar text. This type of summary might therefore contain incomplete, grammatically incorrect sentences and keywords because it will be read only by its writer. In contrast, a formal or reader-based summary, which demonstrates its writer's ability to extract ideas from a text, is written for a specific audience, such as a university professor. Therefore, a formal summary must meet the requirements of academic writing, and the sources must be clearly indicated in it to avoid plagiarism.

### **2.3 Skills involved in summarisation**

Previous research has shown that summary writing is a rule-governed and multifaceted process that draws on a variety of skills including reading comprehension, summarising, paraphrasing, and writing (van Dijk, 1980; Hidi & Anderson, 1986). In order to demonstrate the complexity of written summarisation, the roles of the language skills involved in the process are described next. For the sake of transparency, the four skills are discussed under separate headings.

#### **2.3.1 Reading comprehension**

Based on the fact that summary writing requires the preliminary reading of a source text, summarisation is both a reading and a writing task (Hedgcock & Ferris, 2009). Reading comprehension is therefore as essential in the process of summarisation as the writing part. It must be noted, however, that reading for a specific purpose, in this case for summarising, is a more challenging and difficult process than reading for pleasure. The reason is that summarisation demands not only the comprehension of the global meaning of a passage but also the identification of the connections between the individual propositions within the text (Johns, 1988). Summarisation therefore requires the critical reading of the source text and the careful evaluation of its ideas because any misunderstanding will be reflected in the end product. Furthermore, Johns believes that familiarity with the content area of the source text results in a more thorough

understanding of the passage. This is because the more background knowledge of the topic the reader possesses, the easier it is to grasp the gist of the text because the content of the material is not entirely new to the reader.

In addition, Tankó (2013) suggests that different reading strategies are used depending on the type of the summary. In the case of a global summary, the summariser must read each part of the text carefully and extract all the main ideas from the passage. However, when writing a guided summary, summarisers can concentrate only on those parts of the source text which are relevant to their reading and writing purposes. In this way, they do not necessarily have to read the whole passage with the same intensity but can read the text selectively and only process thoroughly the relevant parts.

### **2.3.2 Summarisation**

As stated earlier, certain elements of the original text which are not necessary for the reproduction of its gist must be condensed or eliminated during summarisation. In order to do that, summarisation rules, more specifically, the macrorules proposed by van Dijk (1980) can be applied. Macrorules make possible the successful extraction of the essence of the source text. The reason these rules are called macrorules is that they help the writer to determine the macrostructure, that is, the global meaning of the text by generalising and deleting information from the microstructure, which represents all the individual micropropositions of the text and the relationships between them.

The first rule is construction, which allows the writer to incorporate all pieces of information that denote a series of events into one superordinate term or idea. Even if there are some subcomponents of the action that are not explicitly stated in the text, a summary sentence can still be constructed by combining the facts available in the passage with the summariser's background knowledge of the topic.

The second rule is generalisation through which a list of items similar in meaning can be replaced with a global term or idea. Although this is very similar to construction, there is an important difference between the two rules. In the case of generalisation, the summariser does not use content that is not present in the original text to create a new macroproposition. This means that the summary writer must select a macroconcept which encompasses only those ideas which are part of the original passage. Moreover, the least general superconcept must be chosen as a substitute for the individual items to avoid the over-generalisation of the ideas.

Van Dijk's third rule which can be applied in the summarisation process is deletion. After the identification of the central ideas, the summariser must eliminate all the irrelevant, unnecessary, and trivial information from the original discourse. This means that basic facts about the world and supporting details, without which the main ideas can still be understood, must be deleted in order to capture only the essence of the text.

With the help of a fourth macrorule, the so-called zero rule, summary writers can copy certain propositions from the source text and include them in their summaries without any modification to their semantic content. This rule can be used if each semantic unit is equally important for the interpretation of an idea, in which case none of the above-mentioned rules are applied.

### **2.3.3 Paraphrasing**

Paraphrasing, that is, the rewriting of a passage using different words is also an integral part of summarising. After condensing the gist of the source text, summarisers must rephrase the information in order to avoid copying parts verbatim from the material (Swales & Feak, 1994; Friend, 2001). According to Tankó (2013), both the wording and the syntactic structures of the original discourse must be altered to a substantial extent.

However, the necessary semantic content must be fully preserved, and no extra information can be added to the text.

Although paraphrasing is an essential skill in academic writing, Keck (2006) found that both L1 and L2 writers have difficulty with integrating information from a text into their own writing in their own words. The most common mistake is that writers make only minor lexical and grammatical modifications to the original text, as a result of which the paraphrased version looks very similar to its source. Keck believes that a number of reasons might account for this problem. In the case of L2 learners, inappropriate textual borrowing often results from the writers' low level of language proficiency and narrow vocabulary. In addition, some people might be unfamiliar with the rules of using sources, and thus they might unintentionally commit plagiarism. The lack of practice in paraphrasing is another probable cause, which, however, can easily be solved according to Keck if students receive formal training in paraphrasing.

#### **2.3.4 Writing**

A summary written for academic purposes must meet the requirements of academic writing. Therefore, in order to be able to write an effective summary, students must be familiar with the most important features and the formal requirements of a text. In Halliday and Hasan's (1976) understanding, a text is a semantic unit of any length which can be realised in both a spoken and a written form. The property which distinguishes a text from a sequence of unrelated sentences and makes it a unified whole is texture. One of the means of creating texture is cohesion, which refers to the semantic relations between certain elements made explicit through grammatical ties such as reference and substitution, or through lexical cohesion, for instance, the repetition of a word.

Another essential quality of texture is coherence. This denotes the logical organisation of ideas related to the main topic, which accounts for the continuity and

intelligibility of the text (Smalley, Ruetten, & Kozyrev, 2001). Together with logical organisation, the use of linking words and phrases plays a crucial role in achieving coherence. With the use of transitions, the connection between sentences is indicated, and the sentences follow one another smoothly. In this way, the readers, based on their basic knowledge of the world and the information provided in the text, can comprehend the message the text seeks to convey.

In academic writing, the structure of a piece of writing is also of major importance in achieving unity. A summary can constitute a paragraph in itself or is part of a paragraph. According to Smalley et al. (2001), a well-structured paragraph consists of a topic sentence, support, and a concluding sentence. The topic sentence introduces the topic, which explains what the paragraph is about, and the controlling idea, which expresses the writer's attitude towards the subject. The support is used to develop the topic sentence by providing evidence for, clarification, and illustration of the points related to the main idea. Finally, the concluding sentence restates the gist of the paragraph in different words.

In the case of a longer summary, the text is usually divided into multiple paragraphs. The authors state that paragraphs can be categorised into three types in accordance with their functions: introductory, developmental, and concluding paragraphs. As its name suggests, the introductory paragraph presents the central idea of the text which is introduced in the thesis statement. The developmental paragraphs discuss the most important aspects of the topic described in the source text, while the concluding paragraph restates the points made in the summary. Familiarity with these paragraph types can be especially relevant for global summary writing.

### **3. Academic relevance of summarisation**

The necessity of summarisation skills is corroborated by the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, which differentiates between four types of

language activities needed for efficient communication: reception, production, interaction, and mediation (Council of Europe, 2001). The communicative strategy relevant for this paper is mediation, which allows the language user to act as “an intermediary between interlocutors who are unable to understand each other directly – normally (but not exclusively) speakers of different languages” (p. 87). Mediating strategies include interpretation, translation, paraphrasing, and finally, summarisation within an L1 or an L2 or between an L1 and an L2. Summarisation as a mediating strategy plays a crucial role in communication because it allows the reformulation of the gist of a message in order to make it more comprehensible or easily accessible for others.

Another indicator of the academic relevance of summarisation is the fact that the most widely known international language tests such as Pearson Academic, IELTS, and TOEFL, all of which measure English language proficiency for academic purposes with typical academic tasks, include various types of summarisation tasks. For instance, the PTE Academic examination contains both written and oral summarisation exercises (“PTE Academic Tutorial”, 2011). As for the written part, the examinees are required to write a summary after reading a short passage and after listening to a recording. In another task, the test-takers are asked to retell the content of a spoken text in their own words. The fact that these language tests lay such emphasis on summarisation proves that summary writing is an authentic academic writing task necessary for university students.

In addition, the Department of English Applied Linguistics at ELTE provides students with direct assistance in the acquisition of the most important academic reading and writing skills. During the Academic Skills seminars, undergraduates are given formal instruction in paraphrasing, summarising, and synthesising. Synthesising is another essential academic writing task involving the condensation and the reformulation of information drawn from a number of source texts (Tankó, 2013). In the course of their

studies, students are often asked to demonstrate their ability to use the aforementioned skills. For example, when they write their theses, students are expected to effectively synthesise both information acquired from relevant sources and the knowledge obtained during their studies (SEAS “Requirements”, n.d.).

All of these examples provide sufficient support for the fact that the ability to summarise information is essential in the academic context, and therefore students should be taught explicitly how to condense information from source texts in order to use it in their own writings.

#### **4. Effects of summarisation instruction on students’ skills**

Studies have shown that many students experience difficulties when they are required to perform certain types of coursework because they lack some of the skills necessary for the successful completion of the assigned tasks (Taylor & Beach, 1984; Rose, 2001). For instance, students often have difficulty comprehending content material because they are unable to distinguish important information from irrelevant facts. In addition, many students cannot compose a well-structured essay due to their lack of organising skills. Therefore, the development of such instructional materials which help students to overcome these strategic difficulties has been a major objective for researchers. Summary writing has been found to be a useful study tool which can contribute considerably to the performance of students in both secondary and tertiary education. The subsequent sections of this thesis present an overview of a number of research studies which provide confirmatory evidence for the positive impact of explicit summarisation instruction on students’ various skills.

##### **4.1 Reading comprehension**

Given that reading is a core element of the summary writing process, experts claim that written summarisation can be an effective tool to enhance students’ reading

comprehension and later recall of information (Casazza, 1993; Rose, 2001). They argue that summarisers comprehend the source text at a deeper level due to their close interaction with the text, during which they extensively manipulate the content of the passage by condensing and reformulating its gist using their own words. This process helps students to better internalise the material and store the information in their long-term memory.

These arguments are reinforced by Bean and Steenwyk's (1984) findings, which draw attention to the importance of explicit summarisation instruction. In their study, two groups of sixth-grade L1 students were explicitly taught summarisation using either a rule-governed or an intuitive approach, while a third group was not provided with direct instruction. The students in the rule-governed group received formal training in the application of six summarisation rules, whereas the participants of the intuitive group were instructed to write summaries restricted in their length. The study revealed that the two treatment groups got significantly higher scores on both a summary writing and a reading comprehension task than the group without instruction. In addition, the results of this study indicate that students can equally benefit from both procedures because each of these methods require students to eliminate the supporting details from a text, thus reducing the amount of information that needs to be memorised. As a consequence, students do not only better understand what they read but will be more likely to recall the most important ideas of the text in the future.

In another research project, Taylor and Beach (1984) observed the effects of a hierarchical summary procedure on students' understanding of content material. The summarisation method used in this study required students to summarise each subsection of the assigned texts in the form of outlines. This approach aimed to direct students' attention to the organisation of the ideas within a passage to determine whether knowledge about a text's structure can enhance students' comprehension. The comparison of the

students' results on their reading comprehension tasks completed before and after the summarisation training revealed that students achieved significantly higher scores on their post-tests. Moreover, it was found that those students who were trained to use this approach outperformed their peers who either received training in answering questions after reading or received no instruction at all.

Radmacher and Latosi-Sawin (1995) also highlighted the necessity of summarisation skills development in the university context. The researchers provided a psychology class with summarisation training to investigate if it contributed to the students' success on their final examination. They compared the final examination scores of two classes, of which only one practised summary writing, and found that the mean score for the class which received instruction was considerably higher than that of the class without summarisation training. The results of this study confirm that writing summaries based on content material can improve students' performance on their final examinations. In addition, the researchers emphasised that summary writing is an effective study tool which can be used in any course where students are required to comprehend and process source texts. The further benefits of summary writing revealed by this study are specified in Section 4.2 and Section 5 below.

Summarisation has also been proven to be an effective comprehension fostering tool in the case of students with learning and behavioural disorders, who usually experience extreme difficulty while performing certain tasks (Jitendra, Hoppes, & Xin, 2000). For instance, they might be unable to identify the main ideas of a text without external assistance, thus failing to comprehend the passage as a whole. To remedy their learning deficiencies, students with disabilities were provided with summarisation strategy training. It was found that the method was not only effective in facilitating the students'

reading comprehension but those subjects who were taught summarising also outperformed those individuals who received conventional reading instruction.

#### **4.2 Writing skills**

In accordance with Taylor and Beach's findings (1984), the hierarchical summary procedure described in the previous section was effective not only in enhancing students' comprehension but also in improving their expository writing skills. Although the students in the treatment group achieved lower scores on the pre-test than their peers in the other two groups, as a result of the summarisation training they managed to outscore their peers on the post-test. Because this summarisation method forced students to focus on the structure of the texts they had to summarise, it helped them to organise their thoughts in their own compositions in a more logical and accurate way.

Similarly, Radmacher and Latosi-Sawin (1995) also reported a positive correlation between the summarisation method used in their project and the participants' writing ability. At the end of their study, the students were asked to share their observations in connection with the instruction they had received. They claimed that the summarisation training drew their attention to the necessity of considering their audience's needs during the writing process, thus allowing them to produce unambiguous and succinct written compositions.

The positive impact of summarisation instruction on students' writing skills is further supported by Knudson's study (1998), in which she analysed college students' written assignments on the basis of which she designed instruction aimed to develop their composing skills. In a period of five weeks, students were provided with training in summarising, synthesising, and argumentative writing. The participants were asked to write one essay prior to the study and three essays following the three forms of writing instruction. Their writings were evaluated based on five variables: position, issue, support,

macrolevel and microlevel skills. The most considerable improvement in the students' writing performance could be observed after the instruction in summary writing. It was found that the summarisation training enhanced the quality of students' writing with respect to each of the five variables. In other words, practice in summary writing enabled students to organise their thoughts in a more logical way, which resulted in well-structured, coherent, and cohesive pieces of writing. In addition, students made fewer, if any, lexical and grammatical errors than before the instruction. They also managed to generate succinct and specific thesis statements and provided strong and convincing arguments for their claims. It must be noted that Knudson's findings are particularly relevant for the academic setting because undergraduates are constantly asked to complete various types of written assignments, and summary writing can serve as an invaluable tool to improve the overall quality of their written compositions. Furthermore, through writing summaries, students learn to make appropriate references to other texts relevant for the topic of their papers.

Friend (2001) investigated the efficacy of two summarisation strategies on students' summary writing skills. One group of students was asked to cover the ideas most often referred to in the source text in their own summaries, whereas another group was required to identify the specific relations among ideas, to transform related concepts into more general statements, and to include them in their writing. The researcher found that there was a considerable improvement in the written products of the students who used the aforementioned summarisation strategies. Their summaries written following the summary writing training were more accurate in content, and they contained better formulated and more specific thesis statements. In addition, the two experimental groups significantly outperformed the students who were simply advised to write what they personally considered important from the passage. The results of this study indicate that students who

possess adequate summarisation skills are more able to process the information presented in a source text, and they are more successful in reflecting the gist of that passage in their own writings.

The influence of summary writing on overall writing performance has also been researched in the case of foreign language learners. For instance, in Sahebkhair's (2012) study, EFL learners had to read model essays which aimed to demonstrate the basic requirements of effective argumentative writing. However, while one group was simply instructed to carefully read these texts, the other group was asked to summarise the content of the assigned passages. To compare the effectiveness of the two approaches, the participants were required to write an argumentative essay both at the beginning and at the end of study. The written essays were evaluated on the basis of grammar, vocabulary, mechanics, fluency, and form. Although both methods were effective in improving the students' writing with respect to each criterion, especially vocabulary, the researcher found that the learners who received practice in summary writing achieved significantly higher scores on their post-test than those who only read the model essays.

### **4.3 Vocabulary**

D'Angelo (1983) and Bromley and McKeveny (1986) claim that précis writing, which is another term for summary writing, can have a remarkable impact on students' vocabulary because summarisation requires students to rephrase the major ideas of the original text in their own words. During this process, summarisers must considerably alter both the lexical and the grammatical properties of the source text. In order to do that, students must find alternative ways to present the information extracted from the original passage. For instance, through consulting a dictionary or relying on their own repertoire of words, summarisers can replace a number of words with their synonyms. This also allows them to become acquainted with the thesaurus, which is an effective tool to help students

find semantically similar words. The intensive use of synonyms enables students to make mental representations of the lexical items equivalent in meaning and to memorise them in groups rather than in isolation, which can significantly enrich the summarisers' vocabulary knowledge. Furthermore, the frequent practice of summary writing can also enhance the students' spelling of words related to content material. Based on these arguments, D'Angelo (1983) concludes that both "the quantity and quality of receptive vocabularies (listening and reading) and expressive vocabularies (speaking and writing) improve as students become skilled in précis writing" (p. 538).

A recent study conducted by Afraz and Fotouhi (2015) further reinforces the notion that summary writing can enhance vocabulary development. The researchers compared the effectiveness of summary writing and rote memorisation on the retention of new words. They found that those learners who were asked to write a summary of a passage using the previously unknown words from the text were more able to later retrieve the meaning of those lexical items than their peers who were simply required to memorise a number of words from a dictionary. This can be explained by the fact that contextual cues help learners to assign meaning to the unfamiliar words and phrases, and by incorporating the newly learned words into their summaries, language learners store information not only about the meaning of those words but also about the contexts in which they can be used. As indicated by the findings of this study, this process leads to deeper retention of the words, as a result of which learners are more likely to remember the items they included in their own writings.

#### **4.4 Critical thinking skills**

Experts seem to agree that summary writing is also effective in facilitating students' critical thinking skills (Casazza, 1993; Rose, 2001). The reason behind this is that in order to write an appropriate summary, students need to manipulate and transform

the content of the original passage to a substantial extent, which demands active interaction with the material. First, students must carefully judge the importance and relevance of each piece of information presented in the source text in order to decide what needs to be incorporated into their own summaries. Second, they must recognise the connections between the text elements so as to be able to combine related concepts into more general ideas. Third, according to both Casazza (1993) and Rose (2001), summarisers might also need to rely on their own prior knowledge to be able to construct new information. Finally, summary writers must organise the extracted information into a meaningful, coherent whole which is a faithful representation of the ideas of the source text. Each of these steps requires that students make conscious and critical judgments about the content of the text, thus forcing them to engage in critical thinking.

Similarly, Tankó (2013) claims that summarisation is an adequate tool to promote students' critical thinking because summary writers must thoroughly analyse the ideas of the source text so as to be able to capture its essence. Furthermore, through deleting, generalising, and constructing information, summarisers also exercise their problem solving skills. In addition, Tankó states that in certain academic writing tasks, students need to summarise other authors' ideas in their own words in order to provide support for their own arguments or to compare different viewpoints on a certain subject. In order to do that, students must carefully evaluate each author's ideas and present them in a logical manner. This cognitively complex process encourages students to practice their critical reading and thinking skills.

#### **4.5 Other skills**

In addition to the skills discussed above, a few research studies measured the impact of summary writing on further skills, specifically, on listening comprehension and speaking ability. Although the research evidence available is not sufficient to draw far-

reaching conclusions concerning the effectiveness of summary writing on these skills, the results of the following studies are, nevertheless, worthwhile to mention.

Ahour and Bargool (2015) emphasised that although listening comprehension plays a major role in foreign language learning, not enough emphasis is laid on the development of such strategies that help students to comprehend what they hear. In order to remedy this deficiency, they conducted a study in which they used note taking and summary writing to aid the concentration of EFL learners during listening tasks. The participants in one group were required to take notes of the most important ideas while listening to different recordings, whereas those in another group were asked to summarise the gist of the passages after listening to them. By comparing the students' performance on their listening comprehension tests completed before and after the training, the researchers found that both groups reached significantly higher scores on their post-tests. However, there was no considerable difference between the results of the two groups. Thus, based on the findings of this study, both note taking and summary writing appear to be useful strategies from which students can benefit during listening comprehension tasks. The reason might be that both of these techniques require learners to focus on the main ideas of the listening passage, and therefore they are less likely to be distracted by external factors that might otherwise hinder their comprehension.

Furthermore, Lu and Wang (2014) examined the impact of summary writing on students' oral performance in a listening-based speaking task. They noted that certain psychological factors such as anxiety can considerably hinder students' performance during oral tasks. To address this problem, the researchers investigated whether instructing students to write summaries based on audio recordings before speaking about the same materials can decrease students' uneasiness during the performance of speech tasks. Based on the positive feedback of the participants concerning the summarisation training and

their improved achievement on the post-tests, Lu and Wang suggest that organising their thoughts in the form of a summary before speaking can increase students' self-confidence, which can, in turn, affect their oral performance in a positive way.

## **5. Summary of educational benefits**

As can be seen from the research evidence presented above, teaching students how to summarise information can foster the development of a variety of skills necessary for their studies, thus allowing them to become more successful learners, readers as well as writers. Most researchers have emphasised that summary writing can serve as an invaluable study technique for students in both secondary and higher education. In this section, some of the most important educational benefits of summary writing are highlighted to further reinforce its importance as a study tool.

Because summary writing enhances students' reading comprehension and recall of information, it can be a useful tool for students who have difficulty understanding content material and retrieving information during tests and examinations (Casazza, 1993; Radmacher & Latosi-Sawin, 1995). Whereas students can be easily distracted while simply reading through a text, writing a summary based on that passage forces them to better concentrate on the material so as to be able to identify its most important and relevant elements. In addition, by deleting trivial information from the text, the amount of information that must be learnt is significantly reduced.

Furthermore, students are very often assigned such writing tasks which draw on their ability to condense and rephrase information (Frey, Fisher, & Hernandez, 2003). For instance, in the case of a literature review, students must synthesise a number of source texts and present their content using their own words. Similarly, when they are required to write an argumentative essay, they must support their claims with authentic evidence. In order to do that, they must include and reflect on other authors' ideas in their own writing.

Many students, however, tend to copy certain phrases or sentences verbatim from the source text or make only superficial modifications to the original text (Keck, 2006). In these cases, sufficient practice in summarising and paraphrasing can allow students to avoid plagiarism, which is a major problem in academic contexts. In addition, based on the findings of the research studies discussed in Section 4.2, practice in summary writing improves students' organising skills and enables them to write well-structured and concise compositions. Thus, through developing summarising skills, students learn to become better writers in numerous ways, which will most likely be reflected in their academic achievement as well as in their grades received for their written assignments.

As mentioned above, summary writing also facilitates students' ability to think critically (Tankó, 2013). This can be extremely useful when, for example, students are asked to engage in discussions on various topics. This is because in order to convince their partners about the validity of their own position, they need to provide persuasive arguments to support their own assumptions, or counter-arguments to refute their partners' claims. Radmacher and Latosi-Sawin (1995) also emphasise that "summarizing text is certainly an active-learning strategy, and it is reasonable to assume that students will be more involved in discussions if they have organized their thoughts in writing beforehand" (p. 114).

Finally, the acquisition of summarising skills can be especially advantageous for foreign language learners. Because summarisation instruction has been proven to be an effective means of developing the most important skills crucial to successful language learning, such as reading, writing, listening, and speaking, writing summaries in another language can improve L2 learners' language competence and performance. Through summarising, students can also expand their vocabulary (D'Angelo, 1983), which allows L2 learners to express their thoughts in a more elaborate way and to better understand their

partners during interaction. In addition, Tankó (2013) notes that by engaging in close interaction with a text, learners subconsciously learn some of its expressions, which they will easily be able to integrate into their conversations and written texts in the future.

## **6. Conclusion**

The main aim of this thesis was to provide a comprehensive overview of research studies which investigated the beneficial effects of explicit summarisation instruction on students' various skills. The reason behind the choice of this topic was to draw attention to the number of ways in which summary writing can contribute to the success of students in tertiary education. As emphasised in this thesis, summary writing is not only an excellent text comprehension and production tool but can also serve as an effective study strategy for students of all ages. Furthermore, writing summaries in a foreign language can also enhance L2 learners' language proficiency with respect to the most important skills necessary for efficient language learning. However, as demonstrated in the first half of this thesis, written summarisation is a strictly rule-governed and cognitively challenging skill which, based on the research evidence presented, requires systematic practice. Thus, it can be concluded that, due to its various educational benefits and its highly complex nature, considerably more emphasis should be placed upon the explicit instruction of summary writing in the case of both L1 and L2 learners.

As for future research, it would be useful to conduct further studies regarding the efficacy of summarisation training on foreign language learners' listening and speaking skills. In addition, it would also be beneficial to compare the effectiveness of a number of summarisation methods to determine which procedures are the most effective in improving different skills.

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